Evaluation as Positioning in English Language World News Channels

CCTV, France 24, Russia Today, Al Jazeera

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Introduction: Transnational news as a form of dialogistic positioning

When asked to identify world television news channels, most people mention CNN (1980), the first provider to pioneer rolling news, and familiar to any traveller who might want to find news bulletins on the hour every hour. BBC World started broadcasting regular news bulletins and other programmes of general interest in 1991, as part of the World Service and launched its dedicated news-only channel, BBC News 24, in 1997. Sky News started its dedicated channel in 1989. Like national news broadcasters they claim objectivity, impartiality and neutrality, though such notions are challenged by a range of scholars (van Dijk 1985, 1988; Biber and Finegan 1989; Bell 1991; Fowler 1991; Iedema et al. 1994; White 1997, 1998, 2004, 2005; Ungerer 1997). National news involves broadcasters addressing a geographically defined imagined community to which news items may be considered to have relevance, with local references and proximity news values, and with prime-time synchrony dictating what gets into the bulletin. In national news, the ethnocentric lens through which the world is viewed is shared between broadcaster and audience, the time frame is the same, the recency value being defined by the day (as Jon Snow makes clear in his account of how the news is planned, in Chapter 8 in this volume). When this time frame changes, as it must in the case of transnational world news, the constant, cyclical repetition suggests also that a different pattern
of consumption is expected: checking-in for updates, sampling rather than watching a complete bulletin at a certain time of day; and as Montgomery says (2007: 67), ‘a different relationship between discourse and the audience and discourse and the event’.

National news, the evening news bulletin on state or commercial channels, plays a pivotal role in political communication, as it is involved in the formation of the political agenda, the construction of political meaning and the forming of public opinion. Some of these functions are also fulfilled by transnational news. World news came to be seen as an important channel for soft power, a vehicle for public and cultural diplomacy (Sakr 2007; Tussu 2007; Wojcieszak 2007). An example of this can be found in The Guardian’s account of leaked emails from Bashar al-Assad’s father-in-law to the Syrian president in 2012. The email contained advice during the government crackdown on protestors in Syria at the beginning of what would later turn into a major conflict of wide geopolitical significance.

[The cardiologist] told Bashar al-Assad how to ‘spin’ the Syrian uprising, including rebuttal of apparent child torture footage. On 16 January this year, as international pressure grew on Assad to stand down and the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, described the casualties as ‘unacceptable’, Akhras urged Assad to launch an English language Syrian state news network ‘to enable us to address the world of our case in their own language and mentality’. He told Assad it was ‘an extremely important project to be considered at the highest level’. (The Guardian 15 March 2012)

The world news channels BBC World and CNN, addressing the world in their own language, had come to be seen as a key part of the Anglosphere, defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as ‘the countries of the world in which the English language and cultural values predominate’. These countries share a cultural heritage and maintain for the most part political and military cooperation aligned under a number of programmes (intelligence, communications, technology and science). In the 21st century many new news organisations began to spring up, broadcasting to the world in English to challenge this perceived hegemony. Each defined its purpose in terms of a position as well as an opposition, a means to project their voice, their policies and their interpretations of events in the global media – to assert and maintain a presence in the global Anglosphere. There has been considerable academic interest in transnational news: for example, Rai and Cottle (2007)
on the changing ecology of satellite television news, Tussu (2007) on
global flow and contraflow, Nisbet and Myers (2010) on transnational
news and political identity in the Middle East; and there are many stud-
ies of individual channels (in particular Al Jazeera) and the way in which
certain events (in particular the Iraq war) are presented (Powers and
Gilboa 2007; Wojcieszak 2007; Wessler and Adolphsen 2008; Cushion
and Lewis 2010; Ning 2013).

This chapter addresses the question of the positioning of
transnational news through an examination of a corpus of news bul-
letins from four providers. We ask how these channels define their
position in relation to the Anglosphere, and how their positioning
emerges, coincides or diverges in the way they present a sample news
item. Do they present themselves as standing with, against, undecided
or neutral with respect to assessments, beliefs and assumptions about
the world?

Four transnational news providers

Four channels have been chosen for this initial study. Their positioning
was made explicit in their mission statements².

Al Jazeera’s (AJ) mission statement in 2004 reads:

Al-Jazeera is an Arab media service with a global orientation. With
its motto ‘the opinion; and the other opinion’ it acts as a forum for
plurality, seeking the truth while observing the principles of profes-
sionalism within an institutional framework. While endeavouring to
promote public awareness of issues of local and global concern, Al-
Jazeera aspires to be a bridge between peoples and cultures to support
the right of the individual to acquire information and strengthen
the values of tolerance, democracy and the respect of liberties and

On the launching of Al Jazeera International, its Washington bureau
chief declared:

News in the U.S. clearly comes from a very culturally specific view-
point that eclipses many important stories and issues. We want to
provide different points of view from around the world.

The network’s stated objective is ‘to give voice to untold stories, promote
debate, and challenge established perceptions’. In its promos it talked of
reversing the north to south flow of information [...] So you can hear the voice [...] and the other voice. Powers and Gilboa (2007) provide a critical outline of the history of Al Jazeera, including the fact that it has been bombed, hacked and even banned from the Stock Exchange floor. The advertising industry identifies Al Jazeera as the world’s fifth most recognised brand (Sakr 2007: 115). At the time of writing it has five journalists in prison in Egypt serving long sentences, accused of aiding a blacklisted terrorist group and spreading false news.

The France 24 (2006) (F24) mission statement was ‘to cover international news with a French perspective [...] and to carry the values of France throughout the world’. The channel’s head stated the intention as being ‘to cover worldwide news with French eyes [...] France 24 intends to present a view of the news different from that of the leading Anglophone international news channels CNN International and BBC World [...] France 24 wants to put more emphasis on debate, dialogue and the role of cultural difference.’ The choice to broadcast in English is significant for a country which has always insisted on protecting its own language.

Russia Today (RT), set up to provide news ‘from a Russian perspective’, was launched in 2005. In 2006, the director stated: ‘in the West, Russia is associated with three words: communism, snow and poverty’, and added: ‘We would like to present a more complete picture of life in our country.’ In 2013 on a visit to the new RT studios Vladimir Putin announced:

When we designed this project back in 2005 we intended introducing another strong player on the international scene, a player that wouldn’t just provide an unbiased coverage of the events in Russia but also try, let me stress, I mean – try to break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on the global information streams.\(^3\)

A number of lexical items in these statements (other, different from, difference, more complete, break the monopoly, different points of view, challenge established perceptions, reversing the flow, the other voice) invoke the existence of ‘the other’. Their explicit positioning is contrapositioning.

While the Anglosphere broadcasters share English as a first language, thus the name, these new broadcasters choose to use English as a language of international communication in order to reach a global audience. Such provision could be seen as a service for diasporic audiences: new ways have to be found to reach groups of migrants for whom the mother tongue becomes hard to maintain for second and third
generations. It can create a sense of nationhood and belonging across geographical distance. But this is not the only audience that is being addressed. These channels offer nation-states a means to project their voice, their policies and their interpretations of events in the global media.

The fourth news channel in our analysis, CCTV International (established in 2004) or CCTV News, formerly known as CCTV-9 or CCTV International of China Central Television (CCTV), grew from the first monopoly state channel Beijing Television Station (BTV, established in 1958); in 1978 CCTV formally became China’s sole and authoritative national broadcaster. The English language programmes of CCTV-9 (established in 2000, one of 21 channels) gradually developed from a 15-minute news bulletin in English to a 24-hour English language news channel, conceived as an effective way of broadcasting the Chinese voice to the rest of the world and a means of soft power under the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). It declared itself ‘China’s contribution to greater diversity and wider perspectives in the global information flow’, explaining that ‘the target audience is foreigners both inside and outside China’. A useful account of the tension between serving national interests and changing international perspectives is provided by Ning (2013) in her outline of the evolution of that channel and the Chinese Reach Out policy.

This chapter questions the imagined audience of these news providers and examines the way the latter position themselves as countering the world view of an ‘other’: an interesting and complex configuration in the transmission of values. These broadcasters present an audience of ‘foreigners’ as a raison d’être for transmitting national aims and interests, highlighting their own role as interpreters.

National news discourse can reinforce a shared national identity. But for our world news channels, the audience is outside the primary constituency, and the discursively linked community is being addressed in a language which is not that of the community. The relationships between broadcaster and audiences are not based on shared social and geographical space within which the audience has been socialised in the same way, via family, education and social interaction. Transnational media form a community which is not based on shared state-centric identities. The channels position themselves in relation to the local by claiming to give visibility to what is being ignored; and in relation to the global by counterbalancing, providing another view. Thus, they are filling a gap and correcting what they present as the Anglosphere’s astigmatic tunnel vision.
The identifying opening sequences of logos, music and studio images which introduce the news are evidence of the homogenisation of TV news channels. All have high-volume music as introduction and, for three of them at least, we see the revolving globe, slightly differentiated by choice of colour. For background colour, banner streams and other graphics, France 24 favours blue, CCTV red, Russia Today green and Al Jazeera gold. Al Jazeera has a distinctive and aesthetically pleasing logo. The news programmes themselves show a transnational global professionalism, making use of technological affordances in much the same way; all draw on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Skype in their news; all use relatively young reporters in the field. But there are differences in selection, emphasis and presentation. This chapter aims to examine some of these differences.

Methodology

A corpus of 36 half-hour news broadcasts was recorded for each of the four channels between 2011 and 2014 as part of a project with students of Political and Communication Science at the University of Siena. All were analysed for their content and transcribed, making a verbal corpus of over 100,000 words as illustrated in Table 2.1.

The corpus was interrogated using Wordsmith Tools 5 for a variety of quantitative data; subsequently a qualitative comparative analysis was carried out for one particular news item, the Ukraine-Russia treaty of 17 December 2013.

Quantitative data: Identity and nationality

Mentioning something is already an evaluation, that of relevance. Nisbet and Myers (2010: 349) claim that national providers are likely to promote a national political identity, and that those that are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Tokens used for wordlist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>30,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F24</td>
<td>28,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCTV</td>
<td>30,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AJ</td>
<td>29,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107,619</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
transnational are more likely to highlight some form of transnational (e.g. Muslim or Arab) political identity, increasing the salience of alternative collective identities at the expense of nation-state-centric identities. We analysed the occurrence of references to nations and capitals and interrogated the corpus for lexical items which might suggest that this process was in play in our data, comparing their frequency across the corpus (Table 2.2. As can be seen, CCTV has the most references to nation-states and nationality (even after its own nation terms are removed). This is followed by F24. RT has the most references to the Anglosphere. AJ has most references to other identities and makes no mention whatsoever of its own nation, Qatar (the only three occurrences are in RT).

### Evaluation and dialogistic positioning

All the channels announced in their mission statements that they intended to present a different view of the world, asserting relativity and reproving the Anglosphere for being partial. Partiality involves subjective interpretations of events through evaluations and opinions, and in this section we will examine the concept of evaluation in texts.

Evaluation is a complex phenomenon, involving many different linguistic resources from a wide range of categories. Attitudinal meanings can only be fully explained by analysis of the context. There is a large body of work on the concept of evaluation or subjective meaning in texts (for a useful account see Hunston and Thompson 2000; Jullian 2008) and a number of terms have been used to indicate such concepts as personal feelings, attitudes, value judgements or assessments. These include appraisal and engagement (Martin and White 2005);
Evaluation as Positioning in English Language World News Channels

modality (Stubbs 1986); point of view (Simpson 2003); ideology (Fowler (1991); Fairclough 1995, 2003); affective meanings (Cheshire 2005); and stance (Conrad and Biber 2000). Evaluation can be explicit or implicit, averred or attributed, not only in propositions but also in presuppositions. CCTV, for example, provides the most examples of positive self-evaluation, mostly through the voice of representatives and specific references to national policy, often in the form of presuppositions (e.g. China will continue to be a brother and a partner to the African people; ... continue to nurture China’s global competitiveness; ... goodwill, responsibility and the growing confidence of China … reflects the strength, tenacity and courage of the Chinese military; …as the face of Chinese diplomacy to show our national dignity and friendship; … to reflect the strength maturity and honour of everyone in the Chinese military as a united front).

Every act of evaluation is an addition to a system of values and so we get some idea of the values that China is presenting through CCTV. One can detect a real or imagined audience to whom these evaluations are directed and a dialogue in which China is positioning itself.

Dialogistic positioning (Martin and White 2000, 2005) concerns the means by which speakers and writers adjust and negotiate the argumentability of their propositions and proposals. Martin and White define it as:

The means by which speakers/writers represent themselves as engaging in a ‘dialogue’ to the extent that they present themselves as taking up, acknowledging, responding to, challenging or rejecting actual or imagined utterances from other speakers/writers or as anticipating likely or possible responses from other speakers/writers… To different degrees and in different ways, they all acknowledge or invoke representations or points of view which are to some degree different from the representation/point of view currently being advanced by the text. It is this alternative position therefore with which the speakers/writers present themselves as engaged dialogistically (Martin and White 2005: 5.2)

From many analyses of the ways in which evaluation is carried out in news (Bednarek 2006; White 2006; Jullian 2008) it is clear that all news will contain attitude, but some attitudes, as it were, have more attitude than others. Consideration is also given to the way the resources present the speaker/writer as opening up (expanding) the dialogue to divergent positions (evidence, likelihood,) or as closing it down (contracting) so as to limit or suppress divergence (denial, pronouncement and authorially endorsed attribution). There are a number of these features which are
key in dialogistic positioning in our corpus, and the quantitative data can reveal which strategies are preferred by which channel. The evaluations expressed by RT involve more superlatives and saturated lexis, more stance adverbials to contract the dialogistic space (such as clearly, obviously, of course) and perform more denials. Strong evaluation is easily identifiable in qualitative analysis, as we will see as we examine the use of headlines and attribution to convey positioning.

Headlines

The main functions of newspaper headlines are to provide a summary or focus in terms of choice of theme, but also evaluations (Morley 1998). For the most part the television news headlines reveal focus without other evaluation. F24 and CCTV have many more headlines with national content. Participle headlines, which avoid making agency explicit, are a frequent pattern; for example:

CONFRONTING ISIL (AJ)
FIGHTING ISLAMIC STATE (CCTV)
SECURING AUSTRALIA (CCTV)
FIGHTING TERRORISM (CCTV)
FIGHTING THE ISLAMIC STATE GROUP (F24).

Other strategies are to use the name of a country plus a noun; for example:

UKRAINE CRISIS (AJ, CCTV, RT)
YEMEN UNREST (AJ)
SYRIA CONFLICT (CCTV)

or slightly more evaluative phrases such as:

IRAQ IN TURMOIL (AJ)
EGYPT ON EDGE (RT).

RT chooses to make agency explicit, particularly when the US is involved (US AIR STRIKES ON SYRIA). It also highlights its positioning towards the Anglosphere by its frequent use of punning and cryptic headlines, familiar to British newspaper readers but often inscrutable to non-native speakers, such as:
RAZE OR RISE (about the air strikes)
TERROR CR-ISIS
DEVOLVING DOOR (about the Scottish referendum, pun on ‘devolution’ and the film Revolving Doors)
PEACE IN PIECES (about the Ukraine crisis)
NO-FRACKING WAY, GET FRACKED, FRACKING UP (about shale gas extraction policy in US and UK)
SANTI-MONIOUS (about sanctions on Iran)

and intertextual references:

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED (David Cameron on troop-withdrawal from Afghanistan echoing the controversial Bush announcement)
LOSING MY RELIGION (an item about increasingly secular Britain echoing a song by the group REM).

These seem to be used particularly to headline issues on which Russia is in conflict with the US or UK, revealing a certain Schadenfreude about what is happening in those countries. The fracking issue clearly has repercussions for Russia’s dependence on its own oil and gas reserves. Sometimes AJ also resorts to this kind of headline. Though the evaluation is less jokey in tone, they reflect the mission statement about the ‘other voice’:

NO WARM WELCOME (about migrants’ negative experiences when they arrive in Europe), REVERSING THE NEGLECT (about Mozambique’s elections and a lack of Western investment).

Attribution

Another feature of evaluation whereby positioning can be manipulated is that of attribution, using other voices to convey certain values that do not match any impartial, neutral reporting of facts by the news presenters. As Jullian (2008 : 120) says:

The skilled exploitation of the interplay between averral and attribution allows the writer to construct a stance by transferring the role of the averrer. Thus, authors can make convenient use of attribution by quoting heavily evaluative materials while delegating their accountability to someone else.
All the news channels use the words of legitimated persons (LPs), named expert and elite participants speaking as public figures through speeches and announcements. In these cases the footage is often from official occasions where we see the rest of the world’s press gathered, although occasionally an interview is used. F24 usually prefers to summarise a speech. Al Jazeera makes the greatest use of VOX (selected members of the general public who appear in news broadcasts speaking on their own behalf) in line with its mission statement of listening to the ‘other voice’; RT makes frequent use of experts from other countries, in particular geopolitical experts, often academics or journalists, but also disaffected nationals (such as Ron Paul) to voice strong evaluations, frequently with an anti-Anglosphere stance.

Qualitative analysis

The news coverage of one international news item is analysed here to exemplify some of the linguistic and discursive features of evaluation; to highlight aspects of news report structure and visual production styles; and to show how TV audiences for these channels are presented with occasionally startlingly different representations of the same event.

On 17 December 2013, the signing of a trade deal between Russia and Ukraine in the Kremlin in Moscow was covered by all four providers represented in our corpus. Ukraine had been a news item for some time as demonstrations in Kiev against the government had continued for several weeks, and the broadcasters were able to use previous archive footage as well as current visual material related to the event. It is the first item on the CCTV news broadcast (5 minutes 40 seconds), the fifth item for Russia Today (5 minutes 51 seconds), the second to last item for F24 (2 minutes and 16 seconds, the same as Al Jazeera).\(^5\)

We focus on both verbal and visual texts, following Entman who notes that ‘through repetition, placement, and reinforcing associations with each other, the words and images that comprise the [news] frame render one basic interpretation more readily discernible, comprehensible and memorable than others’ (1991: 7). A comparative perspective in the study of news frames can reveal ‘critical textual choices’ (1991: 6) which can seem natural and unremarkable until compared with other sets of choices which highlight a particular interpretation of events and exemplify the different positioning of the broadcasters.

Three levels of meaning – linguistic, discursive and visual – combine to produce a view of the same news event. At the linguistic level, we examine the features of the verbal text that reveal evaluation.
At the discursive level, adapting Hartley's categories (1982, see also Thornborrow et al. 2012), we examine the news presenter's introduction as the opening frame, and look at the development or focusing, considering the ways in which the news presenters' introductions are elaborated. We also examine the ‘realisation’ features, that is the selection of visual material, the way verbal and visual texts are combined in the editing process and the voices that are included (the news presenters (NP) and reporters, LPs and VOX). In some cases the coda or closing comments are also considered (Haarman 2009).

The first two items have some points in common.

CCTV

(verbatim text in italics)

The CCTV NP, viewed slightly from below and speaking to camera for the whole of the introduction, frames the event as a meeting of two presidents (the presidents of Russia and Ukraine have met in Moscow, amid continuing demonstrations in Kiev). In an authoritative tone he describes the Ukrainian president as having secured a 35 per cent discount of natural gas supplies from Russia in order to help save the Ukrainian economy from financial collapse. Presidential roles and decisive action (decision to abort plans to enter into a trade agreement with the EU) and strategy (a strategic pivot towards Moscow) are highlighted as values in the verbal text. The NP then passes to a reporter in Moscow for the focusing phase of the report, which consists of three different elements: two to-camera LP statements from Putin and Yanukovic (extracts from filmed formal interventions), each one framed by the comments of the reporter who introduces them as having reached agreement on some very sensitive issues after hours of negotiation behind closed doors. Speaking from Moscow with a night-time scene of the city behind her, the correspondent first announces the deal to camera, attributing to Putin a statement in summarised reported speech which foregrounds a historical relationship:

Correspondent: Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed the importance that Moscow places on its historic ties to Ukraine.

The relationship between the two presidents is described in terms of host and guest but it also sets out an economic relationship: Russia accounts for 30 per cent of Ukraine's trade balance. Over the verbal text the realisation choices highlight the two presidents, seen together in a formal
reception room, then in middle close-up Putin speaks to an audience in voice-over translation. His statement makes a deontic assertion about necessary action, though only in vague terms:

Putin: *We have witnessed during the last two years a certain decrease in exchange of goods. Last year was 11 per cent and this year is an additional 14.5 per cent. A time has come to take energetic measures, not only to return to the level of previous years, but also to establish the conditions to move this issue forward.*

The anaphoric nouns (*energetic measures, issue*) are not unpacked but the subtext of control of energy resources will be reinforced by a later visual text focusing on gas supply lines.

The images which accompany this first part of the report continue to show Putin and Yanukovic in various formal settings in palatial halls, signing the treaty, shaking hands or apparently engaged in small talk.

The reporter’s voiceover underlines a discourse of agreement and cooperation through repeated terms *agreed, also agreed, joint, joined, coordinate*. Both are seen to nod in agreement. The visual text thus foregrounds first the pomp and circumstance of the signing of the treaty, while the two presidents are given prominence as protagonists.

The reporter’s voice-over orients the focus towards current and future economic needs, including details of the deal and some evaluative

*Figure 2.1*  CCTV: Two presidents
comments (*cash-strapped*, *huge discount*) over archive shots representing
gas supplies: a gas-tank, a gas-flame, a gas-pipe in snow, a pipeline being
dug and a vast sprawling power station site on a wintry plain.

The deal is presented by Yanukovic, again with voice-over transla-
tion and speaking to an audience, in positive terms, through a strong
epistemic assertion with intensification:

Yanukovic: *It will let us significantly improve our performance in the
sphere; its realisation will bring more tangible positive results to entire
sectors of the economy and our governments.*

This choice of attribution constructs the frame as a reciprocal deal (*a two
way road map*) which will benefit both sides (*our governments*).

The voices presented in this report are those of the political elite: the
two presidents. The CCTV news coverage unfolds as a report which
highlights the economic aspects of the deal and plays down any dis-
sent in Ukraine. As we can see, however, the item also problematis-
se the economic future of Ukraine and foregrounds the need to move
forward. The reporter closes with the statement that key questions
remain unanswered, bringing the focus to the internal opposition, while
mentioning that there was no discussion about a possible Russian-led
customs union, as if that had been an expectation.

Correspondent: *The question is whether this will be enough to appease the
Ukrainian’s pro-Western opposition, and help resolve the escalating tension
there.*

This provides transition to – and frames – the next segment from Kiev,
a live two-way with split screen introduced by the NP:

NP: *Good afternoon Stephanie, well, obviously Ukraine is just about one
step closer to Russia by clinching the deal, but how this has been received
by the factions in the political makeup in Kiev?*

Note the presupposition that oppositions consist of ‘factions’ rather
than a united front.

The correspondent becomes full screen with the daytime Inde-
pendence Square behind her showing people mingling and reading
newspapers. The banner reads **UKRAINE TENSIONS. Russia, EU vie for**
importance. Yet there is a slight mismatch between the title and the actual report.

The correspondent talks of a large question mark over the entire process, and a lack of consensus becomes the repeated trope in the segment. In response to a question from the NP, the correspondent is vague:

Correspondent: Well, the demonstrators, they say, numerous things they say, they concur on the fact that many say they are going to stay until it’s over. ‘Until it’s over’ means different things to different people.

Remarkably, during the great majority of this report the visual track, rather than focusing on possible tensions in the Kiev square, repeats the same footage which accompanied the first segment of the item from Moscow, returning to live images from Kiev only at the end. The images, in long shot, show people milling about, a small blue camping tent, and a man holding a hard hat and the Ukrainian flag worn like a scarf (giving what might be a victory salute) as the crowd moves on.

No one is given a voice to camera, but the correspondent assures us that many of the protesters vow not to step down, concluding however with the possibility that some might take a break for Christmas.

The NP closes the item, promising, somewhat ironically given the lack of Ukrainian visuals, We will keep a close watch on what is going on in Kiev.
Al Jazeera

(verbal text in italics)

This package opens with a voice-over reference to the image of the two presidents, heads together smiling and talking: ‘it was a very public display of affection’. The headline banner reads: UKRAINE AGREEMENT PUTIN AND YANUKOVIC REACH TRADE DEAL as the correspondent in voice-over announces an affirmation of the close economic and cultural links between Russia and Ukraine, adding that the meeting produced more than just memories of a shared history. Details of the deal are given in voice-over as the camera pans out to show essentially the same scenes of the signing ceremony and the friendly interaction between the two men, smiling and nodding, as in the CCTV report. The deal is called a landmark agreement and the advantages are highlighted: an immediate saving of 10 billion dollars for the hard-pressed Ukrainian authority. This information is accompanied by images referencing the nature of the deal: shots of a gauge, enormous gas-pipes in close-up, or in rows in the snow, men in hard hats examining machinery. The visual text then returns to Putin in close-up speaking from a document, the shot panning out to include the large formal meeting in an elegant mirrored and gilt reception room and focusing finally on Yanukovic, also in close-up, reading from a prepared statement with voice-over translation. The extract is exactly the same part of the text used by CCTV.

The correspondent summarises the political situation in voice-over as the scene switches to the square in Kiev, showing, again, the same images as in CCTV of the man with the hard hat wrapped in a Ukrainian flag. The camera pans from the square’s iconic angel to a ground level close-up of the backs of rows of riot police in black, facing a crowd with many furled flags before them as the voice-over reports:

[Yanukovic’s] visit deepened the political crisis in Ukraine where for weeks protesters have been demanding closer ties with the EU, now the opposition is blocking the work of the country’s parliament asking for government resignations and early elections.

Images of men walking as if in a demonstration, singing or chanting, and of the police accompany a verbal text which underlines the question of a trade agreement with Europe, the visuals here showing the pro-EU allegiance of the protesters foregrounded by the long-shot of men holding the EU flag.
The protesters had been fearful that Yanukovic would sign a deal with Russia committing Ukraine to a Russian customs-union which would finally close a door to a trade agreement with Europe. That door remains open, the customs-union was never signed and never even discussed said President Putin.

The package returns to the correspondent in Moscow.

Peter Sharp: President Yukanovic will be delighted with this deal, he got what he wanted, without having to sign the Russian-led customs-union document that would be a signature that would further enrage his political opponents in Kiev where tens of thousands still mass in the streets.

AJ uses distancing in its framing of the event, opening the account with irony, and cataphorically introducing the whole package with it was a very public display of affection, as if to create suspense. The emphasis is on the public face of a relationship with the hint that this might not reflect reality. AJ has chosen to foreground the political process, with the scenes of the grandiose surroundings, orderliness, evidence of planning and organisation. The deal is evaluated in terms of importance (a landmark agreement, a huge 30 per cent) to the Ukrainian economy, presented as being in difficulty (hard-pressed, shore-up, battling). Emotions are foregrounded and personalised through attribution of affect (fearful, enraged, delighted). The visual text uses many rapid cuts and scene
changes. The opposition is depicted via the outside footage, essentially a peaceful scene, but the images give salience to a heavy police presence.

**France 24**

(*verbal text in italics*)

The F24 NP segues into the Ukrainian item with a banner **PM PRAISES RUSSIA DEAL ENRAGING PRO-EUROPE PROTESTERS** thus:

NP: *Meanwhile, Ukraine’s government has been talking up Tuesday’s deal with Russia, which it says will help stave off economic crisis. This, after Moscow agreed to slash the price of, er, its gas to Ukraine and buy up government bonds there.*

The use of *it says* is a distancing strategy, as is the reporting signal *talking up* with its meaning of promotion or enthusiastic support, also suggesting that F24 does share the Ukrainian government’s view of the matter as the NP then immediately moves on to reference Yanukovic’s ‘pro-European opponents’ and to deal with the ongoing situation in Kiev:

NP: *Now Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovic’s pro-European opponents are demanding to know what he’s given the Russians in return. Protesters have been out on the streets in Kiev since, er, he last month turned his back on a trade agreement with the EU and sought closer ties with Russia.*

The correspondent begins her voice-over report on the details of the deal over scenes of riot police, helmets raised, in waiting. The political split is thus immediately foregrounded and, unlike in the CCTV report, both opposition and protesters are thematised: the political reactions in Kiev to the deal, rather than the signing itself.

Correspondent: *Not far away from ongoing protests, inside the cabinet building, Prime Minister Azarov praises a deal which could save Ukraine from a possible default. Russia will buy fifteen billion dollars worth of Ukrainian bonds and reduce the cost of gas.*

On mention of the cabinet meeting the camera enters the building to show the cabinet meeting itself, in a formal, very sober room with the cabinet seated and the PM reading his statement, voiced in translation. The correspondent characterises the prime minister’s statement
(it is somewhat hyperbolic: *the really historic development, bleeding our economy dry, an end to the history of treason*) as praise for the deal. As the visual text opens on Independence Square – people meandering about through a gap in improvised barricades, several tents, a stage with an audience standing watching, some reading newspapers, and a zoom-in of the front page of a newspaper with a photograph of riot police – the correspondent summarises the PM’s words as blame of the opposition forces, who in turn are standing their ground, saying the deal will cause Ukraine to *drift away from the European Union, [and get] stuck in Moscow’s orbit*.

More metaphors are produced by the opposition spokesperson (Oleh Tyahnibok) expressing fears in an impassioned speech (with an EU flag in the background): *Russia will continue to hold Ukraine on a hook because the gas deficit debt is either constant or it’s growing. If the Ukrainian government makes any unwelcome moves, Russia can at any time make the political decision to collect that debt.*

His warning is followed by images of the square again: bedding being aired, a woman asleep in a sleeping bag, men sitting around a brazier eating, all very well wrapped up against the cold weather or warming themselves by the fire.

The sequence ends with a long shot of the square. In short, the scenes in the square record the protests as a rather static and very cold activity,
people walking, reading, eating, and sleeping in winter conditions with
the hint of a slightly menacing police presence. The correspondent

closes with: *Opposition forces have vowed to block the bailout package’

*passage through Parliament.

The framing in F24 provides evaluations and a number of strategies
used to foreground particular readings of the event. This time neither
names nor presidential roles get mentioned. Instead the NP uses ele-
ments of distancing (informal phrasal verbs and metaphors of physical
action) to present the event. Again the protesters are thematised and
portrayed, visually and verbally, as standing their ground, and their
fears are represented via metaphors with connotations of losing such
steadiness and independence.

**Russia Today**

*(verbal text in italics, bold is used for emphasis or to highlight the specific
linguistic features)*

The NP opens the item speaking to camera in front of a maxi-screen
showing a banner headline which frames the trade deal with positive
evaluation: *REAL DEAL.* The screen presents a carefully created effect
of a torn photograph, though it is actually two separate stills with a simu-
lated tear between them: on the left a scene of young people marching,
with young women in front holding an EU flag and apparently chant-
ing, on the right a large number of people with many Ukrainian flags.
The picture highlights and represents a split.

NP: *The trade deal that Ukraine struck during recent talks with Moscow
may bring some respite to the country’s economy but not to the anti-
government protesters in Kiev, that even though the issue that troubles them
most, a possible customs union with Russia, was not touched upon at the
meeting.*

She too refers to the possible customs union with Russia that was not
touched on, but unlike CCTV and Al Jazeera, no mention is made of
Putin. The item is then passed on to RT’s venture capital host Katie
Pilbeam in the studio, thus placing the item in an economic frame-
work. Before a split maxi-screen of the signing of the agreement and
iconic visuals (a bond, a bag of money with $15BN written in black),
she gives a great deal of economic detail, mainly comparing the Russian
deal (*very good terms*) with the one previously offered by the EU in terms
of economic parameters. There are repetitive contrasts of the two deals,
positive evaluation for the Russian deal, negative evaluation for the EU deal (famously called humiliating) through mention of risk and harsh spending cuts. The information is presented as part of an ongoing dialogue with an opposing viewpoint in mind (at the end of the day it was an economic decision; but investors are happy though; the point is; no-one’s arguing that, what we are saying is).

The NP then picks up the item with attributions from the Ukrainian opposition, then frames the following segment, focused on the Ukrainian opposition:

NP: Despite the economic benefits, the agreements with Moscow have been branded as treason by one of the most outspoken protesters in Kiev, the head of the nationalist party, Svoboda says President Yanukovich has pawned the country’s assets to win concessions from Russia. RT’s Alexi Roshevsky takes a closer look at who’s leading the opposition movement in Ukraine.

On the maxi-screen behind the NP we see scenes from the square in Kiev, flags and slogans, a man in the foreground wearing a hard hat and a face mask, men gathered with hard hats or motorbike helmets and improvised shields.

The headline banner reads HOMOPHOBIC NEO-NAZI WITH MAN-DATE PART OF UKRAINE’S OPPOSITION TROIKA, dateline 5 December, Kiev. This banner remains throughout the ensuing package, though dateline and place change.

Correspondent: Oleg Tyahnybok’s party, Svoboda, has made its position on homosexuals quite clear, attacking gay parades.

The correspondent speaks over agitated and violent visuals: a rapid cut to a summer scene, a march with women holding a rainbow flag and a banner. Suddenly a man erupts into the march pushing the women aside, tearing the banners, snatching one after the other and ripping them apart. The visuals then show a man being bundled into a van by police; then the man speaking, named on screen as Oleg Tyahnybok LEADER SVOBODA PARTY. The scene cuts back to the summer march as police chase the man who had torn the banners as photographers run to take photos. The dateline just reads Kiev.

As can be seen, the verbal text has shifted to very different semantic fields (openly gay, homosexuals, attacking gay parades) all evaluating Oleg
Tyahnybok, the opposition leader presented more neutrally by F24 giving an impassioned speech about the dangers that Russia poses to the Ukraine, but here shown voicing homophobic sentiments:

Tyahnybok: We’re being dragged into homosexual values by the Western states and we will not allow that.

The correspondent’s narrative then moves to foreground another semantic field, that of political violence (assault, scuffles, reckless vandalism, insurgent army, Nazi-collaborators, mercenary, militarised right-wing forces, burning, pro-Nazi slogans), reinforced by the visual text showing images of Tyahnybok speaking before a cheering crowd; black smoke pouring from a building as a crowd below gives Nazi salutes; masked men at a window spraying the crowd; a night scene of a statue toppling; a crowd surging onto the toppled statue of Lenin. The correspondent (now to camera) walks round the pedestal and points out the threatening slogans mentioning UPA, thus bringing other voices into his narrative, in some cases careful to give alternative evaluations. He reports the words of graffiti writers (Yanukovic you’re next, Glory to the UPA), describing UPA as the insurgent army of the 1940s in Ukraine which some in this country believe to be freedom fighters who fought for independence while many others describe them as Nazi-collaborators, presenting two voices though clearly favouring one interpretation with end-weighting. The remainder of the item continues to focus verbally and visually on Tyahnybok and the opposition forces. The photograph of a large man in combat dress is superimposed on a flag and the quotation ‘until the end of my days I will kill Russians, Jews and communists’ appears. Another voice is brought in:

Correspondent: British reporter Brian Flynn had a first-hand glance at the militarized right wing forces in Ukraine. Ahead of the Euro 2012 Football Championship, he went undercover into their training camp.

Brian Flynn (voice-over): These are people very serious about what they do, they train physically to back it up with violence. I watched while they fired with live weapons.

He is also pictured in a wood, with men in balaclavas and camouflage uniforms, followed by scenes of men rushing into a building with guns, then in training on an improvised parade ground, all masked or with balaclavas. A shaven-headed young man shouting and lunging forward towards the camera; a crowd chanting and clapping in unison; a close up
of men, trees in the background, blackface masks and balaclavas hiding their features, Nazi salutes, lunging violently towards the camera: all images leading up to the correspondent’s statement, by way of transition to the final segment:

Correspondent: *And the presence of such people among the protesting crowds seems to cause no concern among European officials walking on the same square.*

Another voice is brought in: a historian from Oxford in a live two-way interview with split screen, on the left showing men in hard hats, on the right, the expert from Oxford (a spire and dome logo behind him). As he speaks, the visual text offers various stills of Oleg Tyahnybok in the company of US Republican Senator John McCain and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton.

Mark Almond: *Well it is rather extraordinary isn’t it? To see somebody that the United States has banned from entering the country on the same platform as Senator McCain, to see somebody who’s been banned by the United States for anti-Semitic statements, for denying the Holocaust, whose supporters actually in the streets of Kiev still do make anti-Semitic as well as anti-Russian gestures and chants slogans. [...] It does signify that the Western politicians are quite happy to use nationalist forces when it suits them.*
Both the correspondent and the expert from Oxford express disingenuous surprise, using the strategy of counter-expectation to evaluate Western politicians (exemplified visually by McCain and Ashton) and their support of the anti-government protesters.

While the correspondent continues in voice-over the visual text unfolds, with a series of rapid scenes escalating in a crescendo of violence: an assault on a vehicle (dateline 2 December, Kiev); a close-up of a man in full-face balaclava; men marching with arms linked; police in riot gear, four deep, confronting a crowd; a man with a chain thrashing the police who protect themselves with their shields. Then the reporter reaches his coda:

Correspondent: So, if Ukraine does make it into the EU someday, it will be interesting to see how people with such different values sit at the same negotiating table.

As the reporter signs off we see men throwing stones or other objects, beating on the heads of the police who raise their shields to protect themselves. The headline is still that referring to homophobic neo-Nazis.

This segment shows an interesting and complex strategy of positioning with some dog-whistle tactics. Mentions of homophobia and neo-Nazis call for a response from a liberal audience, while it is usually the Russian leadership that is thought of as being homophobic. Here it is anti-Russian movements who are involved in scenes of violence with masked men and thuggish behaviour, attacks on peaceful marches for homosexual equality, brutally pushing women aside and juxtaposed with archive footage of militarized right-wing forces. The footage is a collage of disparate occasions and voices but it has a cohesive harmony: the aim is to denigrate the opposition to Yanukovic, who are represented as being more or less identical with right-wing factions and militarised anti-Russian, homophobic, anti-Semitic mercenaries. This is a message to would-be sympathisers with the protesters, deliberately calibrated both by visual and verbal text. The mention of a troika also sends a signal to people who are opposed to the EU policies on austerity. The stills of American politician John McCain and the European foreign minister alongside the homophobic anti-Russian portray the foreign powers involved, thus calling for an alignment against the opposition to Yanukovic. The riot police are presented as victims under attack while protecting the vulnerable from sinister and militarised forces. The amount of editing and searching for footage and
still indicates how much the channel was prepared to put together a complex package which sends many messages to delegitimise the Independence Square protesters by association while not openly criticising them as a group. It is clearly a carefully constructed position with an eye to its imagined audience particularly when contrasted with the packages from the other channels that show the occupation of the Square as a somewhat aimless but certainly peaceful affair, the only menace coming from the massed riot police. It exemplifies many of the strategies of dialogistic positioning used by world TV channels, in particular the use of other voices.

Conclusions

Transnational news channels have harnessed the satellite technology which allows them to transcend borders and geography and have taken up the 24-hour rolling news with in-depth follow-up format as a content strategy. They have chosen to do this through the medium of English, although all have similar services in their own and sometimes other languages. All these channels are presenting a particular view of events; all have an aim in the way they present news. These state-run channels choose to spend our time in a particular way, pointing us to particular interpretations with a number of different strategies. As state-run channels they will also have some kind of state oversight, no matter how much they attempt to assert their independence: Ning (2013) gives a good account of the forces bearing on CCTV and three of the four networks emanate from countries with fierce restrictions on press freedom. We see an interesting set of absences in the data and choices of what is shown while the verbal text is in voice-over.

F24 is the only one to mention national values explicitly in its mission statement, but it is clear that there is cohesion of evaluation, a red thread of national concerns which runs through all the broadcasts. The choice of other voices to express hyperbolic evaluations, the choice of shots to foreground a particular view, headlines which assert or avoid asserting agency, are obvious strategies, weighting particular interpretations outside their own territories. These strategies are equalled by the deafening silences: of AJ on Qatar (an absolute monarchy and the richest state per capita in the world) and its treatment of its migrant workers; RT and CCTV’s playing down of Russia and China’s role in the Security Council; F24’s silence about the less savoury elements in the Ukrainian opposition or the democratic deficit in the European Union. These are all being evaluated tacitly as not relevant, not worth talking about. With their
omissions and inclusions, evaluative lexical arrays, interplay of averral and attribution and their choice of visuals, the providers construct an evaluative narrative which represents the world in a way which suits a national purpose, but is aimed across borders, regions and continents, at those outside their boundaries, a positioning which is both defensive and attacking in a permanent dialogue with the other.

Notes

1. Bold is used throughout to indicate my emphasis in a citation. Italics will be used for citations from the corpus.
3. This is in contrast with the lack of interest AJ shows in the harsh working conditions and many work-related deaths of migrant workers in Qatar preparing for the 2022 FIFA World Cup which have been widely reported, as has the broader controversy of Qatar itself as a venue.
4. Because of a downloading error we have only the single Al Jazeera item on the Ukraine deal and not the whole news bulletin; the position of the item in the bulletin and the opening framing by NP are thus unknown.
5. Public displays of affection are a favourite concern of the tabloid press, usually with a prurient interest in the sentimental life of celebrities in the entertainment world.
6. Of the 21 occurrences of the name Putin only two come from RT.
7. Ukrayins’ka Povstans’ka Armiya or Ukrainian Insurgent Army.
8. RT also broadcasts in Arabic, Spanish and German. CNTV (the internet-based Chinese TV service broadcasts in French, Spanish, Russian, Korean and Arabic. Al Jazeera broadcasts in Arabic, but also has a Balkans service which broadcasts in Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian. It also has plans for Spanish and Urdu services.

Bibliography


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Chapter 2

<table>
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<th>Query No.</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>Query</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>31</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQ2</td>
<td>32</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>56</td>
<td>To provide the missing details for the note 2.</td>
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